

Death toll in Gaza passes 10,000, as Israeli military prepares massive ground attack

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Thousands of Israeli soldiers backed by tanks, artillery, warplanes and warships have surrounded Gaza City, the most densely populated portion of the Gaza Strip, threatening mass killing on an even greater scale than has already taken place. The Gaza Health Ministry announced Monday that the confirmed death toll has now surpassed 10,000 in the first 30 days of the war, which is in reality a one-sided slaughter of the population of an enclave in which 2.3 million people live in an area the size of Detroit or Philadelphia.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said Monday that it had cut the northern half of Gaza off from the southern half, meaning that there was no longer any possibility of the remaining people in Gaza City—estimated at 500,000—escaping from the hellish conditions of bombardment and massacre. A full-scale block-by-block, house-to-house ground invasion of Gaza City could develop within hours, according to military observers and journalists. This is likely to include the destruction of any building believed to be housing Hamas fighters, or any structure the IDF claims has a Hamas tunnel underneath it. Given the reports in the imperialist press of “hundreds of miles” of such tunnels, and the IDF claims that Hamas has built headquarters and other military facilities underneath hospitals, schools and other key civilian infrastructure, it is predictable that a ground invasion will involve the total destruction of Gaza City, with countless casualties among the helpless and trapped population.

The conditions for Palestinians in Gaza, both north and south, combine mass starvation with the threat of imminent death from bombs, rockets, missiles and artillery shells unleashed by the Israeli military. The Gaza director of UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestinian people, said Friday that the average Gaza resident is living on two

pieces of pita bread per day made from flour stockpiled by the UN agency. The Gaza Strip is a “scene of death and destruction,” Thomas White said, while UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the enclave had become a “graveyard for children.”

UNRWA sustains 89 bakeries throughout Gaza, supplying bread to three-quarters of the population, about 1.7 million, but many of these have been shut down because of damage inflicted in the bombing or the exhaustion of fuel supplies needed to run ovens. Israel is not permitting fuel trucks to pass through the Rafah Border Crossing from Egypt into southern Gaza.

At a press briefing by UN aid officials, White said that the water supply in Gaza was hopelessly compromised, partly through the shutdown of water intake from Israel, partly from the collapse of sewage treatment because of lack of fuel, leading to contamination of what water remains. This is endangering the health of the population, especially children, because of the threat of cholera and other diseases related to consumption of untreated water.

Martin Griffiths, chief of UN humanitarian operations, said that 72 UNRWA staff members had been killed since October 7. “I think it’s the highest number of U.N. staff lost in a conflict,” he said. This figure has since risen to 88, according to press reports Monday.

He added that the official death toll reported by the Gaza Health Ministry was undoubtedly a serious underestimation. The real figure will only be known after the rubble is cleared after the end of fighting, he said. Half of all buildings in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged.

The global outrage among working people over the genocide in Gaza found expression Monday in the refusal of 1,200 dockworkers in Barcelona to load ships

carrying war materiel to Israel. The members of the dockers union OEPB called for a ceasefire. According to the Spanish newspaper *El Diario*, “Workers have committed to not load, unload, or facilitate the tasks of any boat containing weapons.” The workers declared that the conditions in Gaza violated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and criticized the decision of the Spanish government to export 300 million euros in arms to Israel this year, adding to the 700 million euros shipped in the last few years.

The Barcelona dockworkers had previously halted shipments of arms to Gaza during earlier Israeli attacks in 2014 and to US-NATO forces during the bombing of Libya in 2011.

The worldwide opposition to the hellish conditions in Gaza even found expression at an otherwise routine press briefing Monday at the US State Department. There was a brief intersection with reality when a reporter asked Principal Deputy Press Spokesman Vedant Patel whether he and other officials were concerned over the possibility of war crimes charges against them because of their role in defending Israeli mass killings in Gaza. The exchange is worth taking note of.

The press briefing took on an antagonistic character as a number of reporters from Muslim and Arab countries peppered Patel with questions about US support for Israel’s war of extermination in Gaza, including the cutoff of food, water and electricity, and the indiscriminate bombing of hospitals, schools and residential neighborhoods. Patel answered all these questions with stock phrases about upholding Israel’s “right to defend itself,” although when asked how killing children in Gaza could be considered “self-defense,” he did not reply. Instead, he made repeated references to the October 7 Hamas attack across the Gaza border into Israel.

The State Department spokesman claimed that civilians were being killed because Hamas used them as “human shields” and deliberately “co-located” military facilities within the civilian infrastructure of Gaza. This reply is particularly disingenuous given that Hamas is a political party which runs the government of Gaza and directs hospitals, schools and other social services.

One reporter cited the resignation of Craig Mokhiber from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, because of the Israel genocide, and

asked whether the US government has “bribed” or otherwise pressured the Palestinian Authority not to bring charges of genocide against Israel before the International Court of Justice. Patel replied blandly that the US would continue to raise with Israel “the need to distinguish between Hamas terrorists and Palestinian civilians.”

When Patel declared that the State Department has a “rigorous process” for determining when genocide is occurring and had not done so in the case of Gaza, the reporter cited a letter from the Center for Constitutional Rights to congressmen and senators, warning them that they could face prosecution for war crimes and “abetting genocide” if they vote to approve the Biden administration’s request for a supplemental appropriation of \$14 billion for Israel’s continued prosecution of the war on Gaza.

He asked Patel directly, “Do members of the State Department officials face similar possibilities?” When Patel repeated his statement that the State Department has not found that genocide is occurring in Gaza, the reporter asked angrily about “hospital after hospital, bakery after bakery” being destroyed by Israeli air strikes.

At that point, Patel turned to other reporters and other topics, and only a few minutes later the press briefing was shut down.



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